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Report on the Proceedings of the International Congrès de Bienfaisance, held at Brussels, September, 1856. By W. G. LUMLEY, Esq., one of the Honorary Secretaries of the Statistical Society.

SUSSEX PLACE, REGENT'S PARK,
October 29th, 1856.

MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,

I have to report to you that, in accordance with the resolution of the Council of July 4th, 1856, nominating me, with Dr. Farr, as delegates on their behalf to the International Congrès de Bienfaisance at Brussels, I attended the meeting of that Congress, which commenced its sittings on the 15th of last month, and continued them until noon of the 20th. I much regret that Dr. Farr was prevented, by unavoidable circumstances, from being present.

It was an assembly of much importance, whether considered with reference to the many eminent persons who attended it, the respect which the Belgian Government paid to it, or the extreme gravity of most of the questions discussed at the meetings.

The number of members present was about 200; and many other persons who were unable to attend, nevertheless sent letters of adherence. Several of the foreign honorary members of this society were present; namely, Professors Friedlander and Mittermaier, from Heidelberg; Dr. Engel, from Dresden; M. Jos. Garnier, from Paris; Dr. Bertini, from Sardinia; and M. von Baumhauer, from Holland, Professor Ackersdyk, from Utrecht, MM. Duepetiaux and Visschers, of Brussels, were the secretaries of the Congress. Among the persons who came from England should be mentioned the Hon. Mr. Cowper, President of the Board of Health; Mr. Wm. Ewart, M.P.; Mr. E. Chadwick, C.B.; Mr. F. O. Ward; Mr. Simon, of the Board of Health; Mr. Alderman Harvey, of Manchester; Mr. H. Roberts; and Mr. Twining.

M. Rogier, formerly Minister of the Interior in Belgium, was elected President of the Congress; but, after having opened the meeting with an address of great force and eloquence, he was compelled, by a domestic affliction, to be absent for several days, and his place was ably filled by M. Ch. Faider, formerly Minister of Justice. M. Rogier returned to the assembly before the conclusion, and pronounced the parting address.

It will be in your remembrance that the Committee of Organization, in October of last year, published a sketch of a programme of the discussions proposed for the Congress, which was then designated the Congrès de la Charité. That programme was rather in the nature of a syllabus, containing a vast number of topics for consideration, than a practical scheme for deliberate discussion. The Council caused a translation of that programme, together with M. Duepetiaux's letter of instruction, to be printed and circulated among the members of the Society, and then established the committee for the purpose of collecting information, relative to the Beneficent Institutions in the Metropolis, which has prepared, and will soon be ready to present to you, a report on that branch of their inquiry which relates to the medical charities of London.

At the commencement of this year, when the war was raging, and when no hope of the return of peace had yet arisen, great alarm was felt in Belgium, as in other countries, in reference to the means of subsistence for the poor and the working classes in the coming autumn and winter. The members of the Committee of Organization, consisting of the following gentlemen, Comte J. Arrivabene, MM. I. G. E. Bidaut, Ed. Ducpetiaux, Ch. Faider, Ch. Rogier, Ed. Romberg, and Aug. Visschers, deemed it advisable, therefore, to narrow the scope of the discussions to be held at this Congress, and to confine them particularly to questions relating to the means of subsistence (*subsistances*).

They observed in the introduction to their programme, that—

“The insufficiency, or the dearness of provisions, the disproportion between their cost and the ordinary rate of wages, the smallness and bad state of their lodgings, and the want of the conditions essential for health and life, are evils almost universal, which afflict, in a manner more or less intense, the working classes in all countries. If it be out of the power of man absolutely to suppress these evils, they may be alleviated in some measure; at least their causes may be combatted, or their consequences neutralised. The means of giving effect to these objects enter into the sphere of agriculture, political and charitable economy, and scientific and industrial processes.”

The programme, accordingly, divided the subjects of discussion into three parts or sections. The *first* treated of the means of subsistence (*subsistances*) in their relation with agriculture; and the *second* in their relation with political and charitable economy. The *third* was more elaborate, and referred to their relations with scientific and industrial processes, and therein to the means of facilitating and bringing to perfection manual labour, of rendering trades healthy, of preventing accidents, and of ameliorating the lodging, furniture, and clothing of the working classes.

Under each section were propounded the various propositions which, in the opinion of the Committee, arose out of, or were involved in, the general topic of the section; and it was impossible not to admire the ability and vast knowledge of economic science exhibited in this document.

There was an appendix which comprised certain subjects referred to under the second section, and entered into a more complete and elaborate consideration of them. These subjects may be stated briefly, thus:—the abuse of spirituous liquors; the establishment of public and co-operative societies for the procuring of good, cheap, and full-measured articles for the poor; the establishment of benefit societies, savings' banks and provident institutions; the prevention of the irregular accumulation of the population in particular localities; and emigration.

Such was the programme laid out for the discussions; and every member of the Congress was invited to enrol himself under the section which appeared most suitable to his views.

It is obvious from these remarks that the Congress was not, in the strict sense of the term, a Statistical Congress. I apprehend that, though its title *Bienfaisance* may be rendered into English by

the words *Benevolence* or *Philanthropy*, neither word in an adequate manner describes the full design or nature of the discussions. The topics did not exhaust the science which is now beginning to be understood in England by the name of economic science, but they formed a large part of it; and though in terms they related to the condition of the poor and the working classes, they extended through them up to every grade of society. It will be difficult to understand that there can be a disorganized, impoverished, distressed, or diseased state of the lower ranks of the population without the middle and upper classes being at the same time painfully affected.

But as the discussions were of this character, I do not consider myself warranted in going further into detail upon the various subjects discussed in the sections, and afterwards brought under the notice of the general meetings of the Congress.

It was, however, part of the order of the proceedings that an account should be given, in reference to every different nation represented at the Congress, of the most recent measures taken in it, either to prevent or alleviate what were termed alimentary crises, or to ameliorate the condition of the working classes in general.

It appeared that England, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Portugal, Piedmont, and Brazil were represented by special delegates, and from all reports were given as to the progress of those countries.

The persons who addressed the meetings were Mr. F. O. Ward and Mr. Ewart for England, M. Wolowski for France, M. Schubert for Prussia, M. Moritz de Stubenrach for Austria, M. von Baumhauer, M. Jonnes, and M. Suringar for Holland, M. de Knonan for Switzerland, M. Mittermaier for Baden, Dr. Engel for Saxony, Dr. Graehs for Sweden, Dr. Faye for Norway, M. David for Denmark, M. Chev. Bertini for Sardinia, M. da Mota for Brazil, M. Suzanni for Lombardy, and M. Wychman for Hamburgh, while M. Ducpetiaux and M. Visschers presented reports in respect of Belgium, which were printed in the "Moniteur Belge" for public perusal.

These addresses were all of interest, and proved that the governments and influential persons of these countries have not been wanting in their exertions to promote the welfare of the lower orders of society. But they were for the most part of a summary and general character, though a few of the members gave some detailed and statistical information relative to the institutions of their several countries. Much statistical information was supplied by some of the members who prepared the reports of the sections on particular subjects, and, among the few discussions which took place at the general meetings, some strictly statistical details were laid before the assembly. I ought to refer especially to a remarkable address of M. Wolowski, who, in combatting what he considered to be an attack upon the partition system of France, gave a series of results to establish, in successive years, the gradual but continued progress of that country in territorial wealth and prosperity, notwithstanding the operation of the system which is so much questioned in other countries. M. Haec, of Belgium, who reported the views of the first section, on the subject of *crédit foncier* and *crédit agricole*, as tending to stimulate and aid agricultural enterprises, also gave some inter-

esting statistical details relative to the operations of the bank at Brussels, termed *La Société de l'Union du Crédit de Bruxelles*.

But it is necessary that one matter discussed at the Congress should be communicated to this society. In the programme it was proposed that, with the view of extending and consolidating the work of the Congress, the members should consider the means of organizing definitively international correspondence, according to the principles laid down at the international Réunion of Charity at Paris, and of publishing a periodical bulletin of the works, reports, and documents which, in different countries, relate to charitable economy. This subject was submitted to the members of the third section, who made a report, in which they recommended the Congress to declare that it was necessary to create an international correspondence, by means of which there might be a mutual communication of all facts, publications, reports, and other documents which relate to benevolence, and the ameliorations and reforms which affect the working and indigent classes of all countries. For this purpose, they recommended the following proposals:—

That there should be established in every country an office of correspondence, or a society charged with the collection of documents transmitted to them from foreign countries, and the return in exchange of the documents of their own nation: and they stated that several existing institutions, among others the Statistical Society of London, might act as offices of this national correspondence.

That in order to combine the different offices, and to impress a uniform direction upon their labours and communications, the office about to be created in Belgium should act provisionally as a central direction, and under this title should transmit such instructions as they should judge useful to the corresponding offices in foreign countries. It should organize, as soon as it was in complete action, a special publication of the documents which it should receive, and deliver them to their library.

That each office should carefully ascertain the most prompt, sure, and economical mode of transmitting its parcels to the offices of correspondence of the other countries, of which a list should be supplied by the central direction.

It was then proposed that a kind of circular letter should be given to persons travelling into foreign countries, which should place them in relation with such offices, so that they might receive every facility in their visits and researches, and be put in possession of the information which they might require in the foreign country to which they went. The proposition was stated in general terms, but was doubtless intended to apply to researches and inquiries of a statistical or economical character.

They proceeded to recommend that every office or association should publish an annual bulletin of publications, reports, and other documents of a nature calculated to interest the general association; or should transmit the document in manuscript to the central office in Belgium, which might comprise it in their bulletin. The interchange of these bulletins, and generally of all the documents and publications to which they might relate, should take place regularly among all the associated countries.

That due consideration should be given as to the means of extending the advantages of this correspondence to all persons of every country who might interest themselves in works of benevolence, and who might desire to profit, under certain conditions, by the relations and interchanges which would thus be established between different countries.

It was further proposed that one or more correspondents for every country represented at the Congress should be named at it, with whom the central direction at Brussels might place itself in relation to carry out these resolutions.

When these propositions were submitted to the Congress at their general meeting, an objection was made to the making special mention therein of any particular societies or institutions, which objection prevailed; and, with the omission of that passage, the report was adopted.

I had no authority to offer the Statistical Society as an institution which could undertake the functions prescribed for England, nor do I think that the Council would be prepared to recommend the Society to form one of the representatives of this great international scheme of a statistical depot, though it is impossible to over estimate the great value of this scheme if carried into effective operation.

I presented to the Congress a copy of the report on the Medical Charities of the Metropolis, already referred to as in course of preparation by a Committee of the Council of this Society; and it was acknowledged to be a document containing much interesting information.

In closing this brief notice of the proceedings of the Congress, I cannot but express the feelings, which prevailed with all the foreign members who were present, of admiration and gratitude towards the enlightened men of this kingdom of Belgium, (a state so small and apparently so insignificant in the scale of European nations,) who, by their intelligence, energy, and activity, have been able to assemble in their capital men of the greatest ability, and of the most eminent position, from every important nation, to discuss the gravest of economical questions; and who thus propound to the world at large, for universal adoption, principles and details which, upon careful and severe discussion, appear to be best calculated to promote the well being of mankind. Through their exertions Belgium stands forward pre-eminent among those nations whose works of peace shall claim the brightest renown in history.

I am,
Your obedient Servant,
W. G. LUMLEY.

*To the Council of
the Statistical Society.*
